

## Book reviews

### Pharmacy ethics

Edited by Mickey Smith, Steven Strauss, H John Baldwin and Kelly T Alberts, New York, Pharmaceutical Products Press, 1991, 555 pages, hc \$59.95, sc \$27.95

The editors of this book say in the foreword that its 'primary audience will be pharmacy students enrolled in a basic ethics course'.

It consists of some seventy previously published papers, several as brief as two pages, and an eighty-page section of cases with ethical commentary. Also included are the codes of ethics of the American Pharmaceutical Association and the American Society of Consultant Pharmacists, the patients' bill of rights of the American Hospital Association, the consumers' bill of rights of the Mississippi Pharmacy Association and the World Health Organisation definition of 'health'.

The papers cover a vast range of topics. Many discuss ethical issues in ways which are relevant to all health-care professionals. Topics include: the definition of health; informed consent; paternalism and respect for autonomy; withdrawal of life-sustaining treatment; experimentation on humans; allocation of resources to the elderly; individual responsibility for health, and professional responsibility for health promotion. Other papers relate these and other issues specifically to aspects of pharmacy - for instance: drug rationing and drug substitution, the use of psychotropic drugs, community pharmacy practice, the profit motive in pharmacy, the sale of tobacco and 'unnecessary' food supplements, drugs in sport and the development of pharmaceuticals by genetic engineering. There is also a discussion of capital punishment and pharmacy - a controversial issue in the

US, where death may be brought about pharmaceutically.

Some of the brief papers could be used as 'consciousness-raising' exercises to initiate student debate over a wide spectrum of issues, while others are more substantial. As students should find almost all the papers readily understandable, the book provides a source which can be selectively 'mined' for material appropriate to an ethics course. But selection would be required, particularly for courses outside the United States, since many of the papers were originally published in American journals and discuss procedures, situations and law within that country.

Moreover, as several of the articles date from before the eighties, and some of these are concerned with developments in pharmacy at the time they were written, their relevance to current students is limited. While there is a valuable review of the history of pharmacy ethics, it is disappointing that more papers have not been included which are concerned to break new ground for readers today.

Where the book does contribute something both new and extremely valuable, however, is in the final section on cases and commentary. This section begins with an excellent introduction to ethical theories and to applied ethics, and this is followed by what, according to the foreword, is a series of 'original cases, the selection of which were based on a national survey of pharmacy faculty to determine what is or should be taught in a pharmacy ethics course, and what kinds of teaching materials are needed'. After each case there is full but concise commentary on its ethical aspects. These discussions are impressive: they draw on a rich variety of philosophical sources - including both the historical and most recent - and consider some subtle conceptual issues, yet they always

maintain a lively clarity and relevance to the case.

After each commentary there is an up-to-date reference section, a list of the key concepts in the analysis and some questions for further discussion. The authors have here produced a valuable source of material which will be a boon to teachers and students alike.

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### Down the slippery slope: arguing in applied ethics

David Lamb, Beckenham, Croom Helm Ltd, 1988, ix+134 pages, hc £30.00

The 'slippery slope' form of argument which David Lamb discusses in this book is frequently employed in medical and other contexts by opponents of some proposed liberalisation of law or morals. They claim that whereas what is proposed may be acceptable in itself, it will lead by gradual but inevitable stages down the slippery slope to an intolerable result. For example, the legalising of euthanasia has sometimes been opposed on the ground that it will eventually lead to the killing of those who are socially, politically or racially undesirable. The thesis of this book is that this type of argument is extremely important in ethical debate, because it draws attention to dangers in innovation that are too easily overlooked.

Lamb begins with an account of the nature of slippery-slope arguments; following James Rachels, he distinguishes a logical and a psychological form. Crudely, the logical form